



PHASCOGALE PENICILLATA

J. Gould and H. C. Richter del. et lith.

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PHASCOGALE PENICILLATA.

Brush-tailed Phascogale.

Tapoa-tafa, White's Journ., pl. in p. 281.

Didelphys penicillata, Shaw, Gen. Zool., vol. i. part 2. p. 502. pl. 113. fig. 1.

Dasyurus penicillatus, Geoff. Ann. du Mus., tom. iii. p. 361.

——— *Tafa*, Geoff., loc. cit.

Phascogale penicillata, Temm. Monogr. de Mamm., tom. i. p. 58.—Skull, pl. vii. figs. 9–12.—Waterh. Nat. Lib. Mamm., vol. ix. (Marsupialia), p. 136, pl. viii.—List of Mamm. in Brit. Mus. Coll., p. 98.

Tapoa-tafa, Aborigines of New South Wales.

Bul-loo-wa, Aborigines of the York district of Western Australia.

Bal-a-ga, Aborigines of Perth.

Bal-lä-wa-ra, Aborigines to the north of Perth.

As several specimens of this animal, contained in a collection lately received from Western Australia, offer on comparison no difference whatever from others procured in South Australia and New South Wales, it is evident that the Brush-tailed Phascogale has an unusually wide range of habitat. It probably does not extend so far south as the island of Van Diemen's Land, or northward of the twenty-fifth degree of south latitude.

The plain and the mountain districts appear to be equally inhabited by it, and from its destructive propensities is I fear likely to become a pest to the colonists. It has already been known to enter the stores of the settlers and commit severe depredations whenever they contained anything suited to its palate, and, whether justly or not I am unable to say, it has also been charged with killing the fowls and chickens of the hen-roost. In the stomachs of some that were dissected were found the remains of coleopterous insects, and what appeared to be a species of fungus. Nocturnal in its habits, it sleeps during the day in the hollows of decayed trees, from which retreat it emerges on the approach of evening, when it ascends the trees and displays the greatest activity among the branches. When captured it becomes quite ferocious and struggles hard to effect its escape, and so severe are the lacerations it inflicts, that even a native can rarely be induced to put his hand within reach of a living one. It breeds in the hollows of the gum-trees, but the precise number of its young has not yet been ascertained. The sexes differ but little in size and colour, but the male is somewhat the largest. The accompanying Plate represents the animal of the size it is when fully adult. It is necessary to mention this, because much difference exists in the relative size of specimens sent to this country, many individuals that I have seen not being more than half the size of those figured, and which is solely attributable to the youthful state of the animal, and not to a difference of species. It was first figured in White's "Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales," a work published in 1790, under the name *Tapoa-tafa*; the specimen there represented is still preserved in the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons, so that we have the clearest evidence of its identity with the animal here figured.

The colouring of the Brush-tailed Phascogale may be thus described :—

Face, all the upper surface and the base of the tail grey; chin, throat, inside of the legs and feet greyish white; a darker grey mark commences at the tip of the nose and extends over the forehead to the nape; the fur is moderately long and loose, that which covers the back and upper surface being uniform blue-grey next the body, and grizzled grey and brown towards the surface; lengthened black hairs are also thinly scattered among the fur of the upper surface; the tail for about four-fifths of its length from the tip is clothed with long and stiff hairs of the finest black, giving that organ a brush-like appearance, whence its specific name; tip of the nose flesh-colour; ears purplish, very thinly covered with fine hairs.

The figures represent the two sexes of the size they attain when fully adult.